

Spring is coming – Build up your abs

Spring is here, or nearly here, however you chose to see things.

Myself I have decided to ditch the winter clothes, and venture out in my white jeans and pretty brightly coloured tops. I must say it is still a tad cold, so I invested in a lilac fur trimmed faux leather biker jacket, keeping warm but still with the element of spring.

So I rejoined the gym and enlisted the help of a trainer, for advice mainly (trainers can be very pricey, just try to get the basics and go it alone, or with a friend) he showed me the decline sit ups, where your head is further down the elevated work bench, and you sit up to be upright, with or without a weight plate (the weight plate really boosted my workout)

I have found these to be the most effective of techniques I have ever tried.

Being a mum, many of us share this same problem area, and the singer Kelly Clarkson, I really felt for recently had came under the dreaded Katie Hopkins wrath, for her weight gain after pregnancy.

Hopkins made (fat jibes) at the new mum on Twitter, in very poor taste I think.

When woman attacking one another for responding differently to pregnancy absolutely disgusts me. If Hopkins had of found her weight an issue she would never of poked fun at others, completely showing her lack of intelligence.

I mean come on, it's like poking fun at a blonde because you're a brunette! Absolutely pointless and pathetic, just like her.

She pokes fun at "talentless" people trying to gain fame, when she herself gets attention from bullying others! Madness she is even given air time.

Well that will be the only time I will give her any attention. Any of you embarking on a new fitness plan for this summer, I

salute you, and wish you all the luck. And remember, a good clean healthy diet is 80% of the battle.
Kisses Holly

What's the difference between depression and burnout?



The difference between [depression](#) and burnout is not always easy to see. There are even certain diagnosis tools which do not differentiate between them and therefore not see burnout as a separate disorder. If we were to compare burnout to other mental disorders, it is most similar to depression. Therefore, the difference between depression and burnout is not always evident.

What do the psychiatrists say?

Even though diagnosis tools do not consider burnout to be a separate disease, **psychiatrists do state that burnout is a**

separate disease. Burnout is generally defined as an extreme exhaustion after the body and mind have been exhausted and pushed too far, according to them.

Is it therefore easy to differentiate between depression and burnout? Definitely not. Depression and burnout namely are very similar to each other and are often seen together, too.

Difference between depression and burnout: the symptoms

Depression and burnout are very similar to each other. Here, there are symptoms which match the both of them. The following examples are among them:

- Concentration issues
- Memory issues
- Sleeping issues
- Exhausted feeling

The symptoms above apply to both depression and burnout. If psychiatrists then want to set a diagnosis, they will often notice that the same tests can be used for both the diagnosis. The results, which are then found in the tests, can thus point at both depression and burnout.

So you see that it is really difficult to define the difference between depression and burnout. In the following paragraph we will give clear differences, so that you get a clearer picture of the symptoms.

The clear difference between depression and burnout

The first difference between depression and burnout is that **depression is more general**. Depression will namely affect several parts in life and can also develop from different

parts in life, such as:

- Your family
- Your friends
- Your hobbies

Burnout is generally **work related**. Of course the stress which you experience at work can affect your relationship, but in depression this is often more clearly seen. Furthermore, a burnout tends to develop from a work situation, while depression can develop in a more general way. A burnout can eventually also influence other parts of life, like a depression, but this is more likely to occur in a later stage. (Iacovides, Fountoulakis, Kaprinis & Kaprinis, 2003). Depression on the other hand, can have a quick and large influence on several parts of life, while burnout will limit itself to work for a longer period of time.

Difference between depression and burnout: occurring together?

Depression and burnout can also occur together. It is not unlikely that a severe burnout can also cause depression symptoms.

Surgical Menopause – getting into your Menopause too early

Four months ago I had my ovaries removed. It was a shock. One minute I was fine, the next I was doubled up in pain, certain that my appendix

was rupturing. A quick trip to hospital and an ultrasound showed a large tumour on my ovary. I asked if it was cancerous. The Emergency Department Consultant could not tell me. The only specialist who was not on holiday could not see me for 10 days. Why do all specialists go on holiday at the same time? It was the same when my sons needed grommets. They were all away. Shouldn't doctors have to stagger their holidays like any other professional?

My initial meeting with the specialist was not positive and I thought about seeing someone else, but I was not keen on a 3 month wait. I was frightened that I had cancer, so I went with the first person available.

The appointment started badly when she asked why I was there. I told her that I have a tumour on my ovary and was promptly told that "we don't call it a "tumour", it is a "mass"". I knew at that point that it was going to be a rough road. Every other doctor from the ED Consultant through to my GP called it a tumour. There was even an arrow pointing to it on the ultrasound scan which is marked "tumour". However, I was told firmly that I was not to call it that. I don't know if this was supposed to make me feel better, or happier or reassured. Either way it achieved nothing and I spent the following week looking up ovarian cancer websites and trying to prepare myself for the worst. The specialist said she could operate a week later so I filled in all the admission paperwork and then hit the chocolate. It did nothing for my waistline but it made me feel brighter. Where there is chocolate there is hope.

I arrived at hospital the following week, petrified and with a bag full of chocolate to get me through the recovery in hospital. Green and Blacks I love you. I will buy shares. It was only your milk chocolate that got me through the following weeks. If you noticed a profits spike in April and May, that was down to me.

After waiting in reception for 2 hours I was taken to a ward full of people waiting to have gynaecological surgery. I was apparently third on the list. Why I had to be there at 6.30am when they did not intend to operate before 11am, beats me.

Once I was in a gown and tucked up in bed, the nurse looking after us all decided we all needed to have an enema. I think she was bored. I was expecting a tube up my bottom so was quite relieved when it just turned out to be a tablet. A modern enema involves a tablet being stuck up your bottom and being told to hold it as long as you can before you race to the toilet. There were 8 of us waiting for surgery. The nurse gave us all an enema within minutes of each other. There was one toilet on the ward. The outcome was predictable to everyone except the nurse administering the tablet. I learned a lot of new yoga positions as I was standing in queue outside the one toilet, trying desperately to hold on. There was no commode available. As I was wheeled off for surgery, I hoped the nurse with the smart idea was the one to have to clean up.

I woke up in my own room after the surgery. I was hungry but the nurse told me that I had to be on clear fluids until my bowel had moved. That proved to be a long time. Why did they give me an enema in the first place? Chicken consommé does not help you have a movement. If it goes in liquid, it comes out liquid. I decided that they were just malicious. Three days of chicken consommé and lime jelly later, I was ready to strangle someone, so I lied. I told the doctor I had been to the toilet. The food ban was lifted. I ate chocolate. It was good, really good. In fact it tasted like manna from heaven. My 6 year old saw it on offer at the local supermarket. My husband and son emptied the shelves. My cupboard overflowed...There is no painkiller as effective as a large bar of Green and Blacks Organic Milk Chocolate. Just liquefy it and hook me up to a drip!

I knew that having my ovaries removed would send me into surgical menopause. What I did not know was how quickly it would happen. The various websites were quite vague about it. I knew that I would need to go on to HRT until the age that I would naturally go into the menopause (generally assumed to be around the age of 51) to replace the oestrogen that was no longer being provided.

I thought that I would be given HRT immediately. Apparently not. The specialist decided it would be good for me to experience what menopause was like before allowing me to have the oestrogen patches.

The hot flushes kicked in 2 days post-surgery. I endured 5 days of hot flushes and night sweats before discharging myself against doctor's orders. Only then did she agree to give me the patches. She told me that women should be able to deal with menopause when it happens, whether or not that is down to surgery. I beg to differ.

I did wonder why I, as her patient, had to suffer because of her beliefs about HRT. It made me wonder how much else of her advice was her opinion, versus official recommendations. I went to see my GP five days later and she was brilliant. When I told her I was still suffering hot flushes and night sweats, she upped my dosage of HRT, saying that nobody needed to suffer unnecessarily. The hot flushes and night sweats stopped within 24 hours. My doctor is the best!

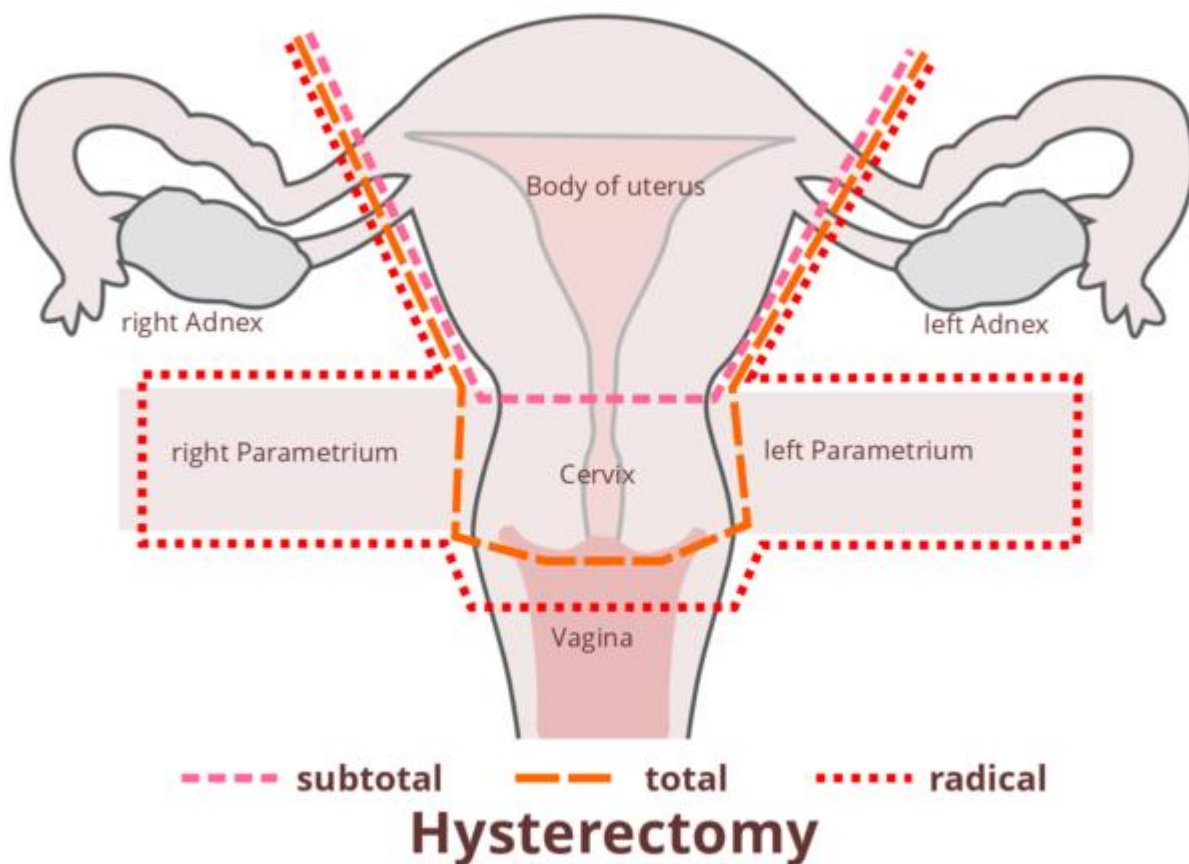
It was a long five weeks until I found out I did not have Ovarian Cancer. The specialist forgot to email my GP with the results, so she found out from me that I was in the clear.

The HRT patches work well. I have had to put an alarm in my phone to remind me to change them twice a week, but apart from that it is all fine. My tummy is squidgier than it was and it was a few weeks before my sons were able to bounce on my lap again. However, I have recovered well and am now back to exercising and back on motherly duties again. All credit to my in-laws who moved in and looked after the children for me while I recovered. All credit to my eldest son who reminded my husband to keep resupplying the chocolate.

While this has been a long story I think the main points I wanted to make are that if you are told that there is something wrong that may be very serious, read around. Don't just read around the subject, read online reviews of the hospital and the specialist you are seeing. I wish that I had, as the same comments I have made above, had previously been made by others having similar surgery at the same hospital, with the same consultant.

Be willing to look further afield for a consultant and a hospital to have the surgery done at, if this is an option where you live. I looked within a 10 mile radius of my home, at 3 possible hospitals and

I based my choice purely on opening hours, not on online reviews. If I had gone as far as 30 miles, I may have had a different experience. Finally, read up on the after effects of the surgery, any follow up medication you may need and the pros and cons of it. Use reputable websites, such as those of national or international charities specialising in your condition. Go into your doctor armed to the teeth with information, don't just take the specialist's word for it. Knowledge is power and power is confidence. If you are confident of your information when you face your specialist, you may have a lot better experience than if you accept without question, the information that specialist gives you. Finally, take to the hospital whatever it is that will make you feel good afterwards, as a quick boost every now and again, can only be a good thing for your recovery.



Winter Darkness, Season Depression

Winter depression is still a mystery to scientists who study it. But researchers agree that people who suffer from seasonal affective disorder are particularly sensitive to light, or the lack of it.

A wistful feeling comes over us in late autumn, as the last remaining leaves drop, morning frosts cover the ground, and the sun sets earlier each day. Hot cider and the warmth of a favorite old coat may be all you need to face the coming winter with good cheer, but for many people, fall melancholy deepens to winter [depression](#).

Winter [depression](#) is still a mystery to scientists who study it. Many things, including [brain](#) chemicals, ions in the air, and genetics seem to be involved. But researchers agree that people who suffer from winter [depression](#) – also known as “[seasonal affective disorder](#),” a term that produces the cute acronym SAD – have one thing in common. They’re particularly sensitive to light, or the lack of it.

Many studies have shown that people with seasonal affective disorder feel better after exposure to bright light. It seems simple enough: In higher latitudes, winter days are shorter, so you get less exposure to sunlight. Replace lost sunlight with bright artificial light, and your mood improves. But it’s actually far more complex. Alfred Lewy, MD, a seasonal affective disorder researcher at the Oregon Health & Science University, says it’s not only a matter of getting light, but also getting it at the right time. “The most important time to get light is in the morning,” he says.

He thinks seasonal affective disorder is due to a “phase-

shift” of the circadian rhythm. The wall clock may tell you it’s time to get up and at ’em, but your body’s internal clock says you should be resting. Bright light in the morning resets your circadian clock.

This is relevant to the “fall back” time change, which happens in places that observe Daylight Saving Time. You might think that setting back the clock one hour would make seasonal affective disorder symptoms worse, because the sun sets one hour earlier. “Actually, I think it’s the opposite,” Lewy says. “The problem is waking up before dawn.”

Lewy says he suspects that “true winter depressives,” the people whose problem is biological and not related to other factors, might feel better after the time change. But the improvement would only be temporary, as days continue to shorten.

Arctic Winters

In Fairbanks, Alaska, in the dead of winter, less than four hours separate sunrise and sunset. With so little sunlight, it seems like no one could escape winter [depression](#); but in fact, many Alaskans fare just fine. One study found that about 9% of Fairbanks residents had seasonal affective disorder. That’s about the same percentage another study found in New Hampshire.

Mark D., who lives near Fairbanks, says he doesn’t suffer from seasonal affective disorder, even though he rarely sees the sun. He pulls 12-hour shifts working in a power plant.

He stays active in winter, so “cabin fever” isn’t a problem for him, either. “If you sit around the house and do nothing all day I suppose it could eat at you,” he says. “But there is always something for me to do – snow-machine, cut firewood ... or just going into town and have a cup of coffee with friends

at the cafe.

“There are people, though, that will have a ten-yard stare in a five-yard room,” he says. Some seek comfort from a bottle, too. “In lots of the smaller villages, that does happen. Drinking is a big problem.”

Seasonal affective disorder researcher Michael Terman, PhD, at the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York, offers some possible explanations for why seasonal affective disorder isn't more common in the arctic. For one, people with seasonal affective disorder may be genetically predisposed to [clinical depression](#) and [light sensitivity](#). Most people, in any place, wouldn't have both genetic traits. “Another way to look at it is that those are the people who are still in Alaska,” he says. People who can't cope might not stay.

But not everyone affected by seasonal changes has full-blown seasonal affective disorder, so estimates of how many people do have it may be low. “Winter depression is a spectrum of severity,” Lewy says. You may have trouble getting up, have bouts of [fatigue](#) during the day, or feel compelled to overeat, without feeling depressed.

These symptoms can be treated with the same therapy given to seasonal affective disorder patients. Bright light – generated by a special light box that's much brighter than a normal lamp – is the first option. It's proven to work, but not for everyone. Also, the right time for it differs from person to person, Terman says. For a night owl, taking light therapy too early could make seasonal affective disorder worse.

New Ideas

om Wehr, researcher at the National Institute of [Mental Health](#), has proposed a new explanation for seasonal affective disorder: It may stem from too much [melatonin](#). When the

[brain](#)'s pineal gland starts pumping out [melatonin](#), we get sleepy. During winter, animals secrete melatonin for longer periods than they do at other times of the year. Wehr discovered that people do, too – but only those who suffer from seasonal affective disorder.

Light therapy would still work if melatonin were the main culprit, because light controls melatonin levels. Researchers are also testing a drug called propranolol, which they hope will improve seasonal affective disorder symptoms by curtailing melatonin flow in the morning hours. Lewy is studying the effects of small melatonin doses given in the afternoon, hoping that they will adjust circadian rhythms.

Raymond [Lam](#), MD, researcher at the University of British Columbia, Canada, and others are studying the role of [brain](#) chemicals like serotonin and dopamine. "We know there are interactions between the serotonin system and the circadian system," Lam says.

Some [antidepressants](#) like [Paxil](#) and [Prozac](#) work for some seasonal affective disorder sufferers. But Lewy says he prefers light therapy to [antidepressants](#), which he says "are probably more of a Band-Aid," because they're not specific to winter depression.

Terman has been testing yet another new way to treat seasonal affective disorder. This therapy involves aiming a stream of negatively charged ions at a person sleeping on a special conductive bed sheet. The discovery that high-density negative ions (not the same ions produced by home air filters) helped people with seasonal affective disorder came accidentally from a previous study. A second study, which will end later this year, has also found a beneficial effect.

The air is full of negative ions in springtime, and not in the winter. But that doesn't explain how ion therapy works. "We don't yet have an answer to that question," Terman says;

nevertheless, “We’re now convinced that it’s real.”

6 Weird Reasons To Wear a Menstrual Cup That Aren’t About Saving The Environment



By Gabrielle Moss

I’m sure that you’ve heard all the virtuous reasons that you should [switch from tampons or pads to a menstrual cup](#) – you’ll

save money, you'll help the environment, you'll get to know your mysterious little lady flower a little better – but you might be surprised to find out there are some other, weirder reasons to make the switch. Because while all those usual reasons are valid, they also make menstrual cups sound like the kale of the period product world – something that's good for you, but not particularly convenient or fun. This stereotype could not be more wrong, my endometrial lining-shedding friends – [menstrual cups are convenient, comfortable, and ideal](#) for the laziest and most absent-minded vagina-havers around. They are truly the ultimate in slacker period products.

If you're rolling your eyes and/or doing the “jerk-off” motion while you're reading this right now, know that I was once like you – I used tampons. I'd struggled with tampons since middle school – they seemed to always leak and irritate the inside of my vagina, no matter what I did – and never quite figured out how to wear pads in public after skinny jeans became a thing. But I thought a menstrual cup had to be a thousand times worse – if I was struggling with a tiny piece of cotton, how could shoving a contraption that looks like half of a turkey baster into my sexy bits be any better? I thought it was just another kooky health trend that my hippie friends were into, like avoiding refined sugar, or chiding me for eating Flamin' Hot Cheetos before 11 a.m.

But about six years ago, I worked at a [store that sold Diva Cups](#), and saw how utterly devoted every woman who came in to buy one seemed to be. Surely they couldn't all be deranged, right? I used my employee discount, tried it for my next period, and never looked back.

Here are the six practical reasons you should consider [switching over to a menstrual cup](#) – and none of them require you to squat over a hand mirror, I swear.

YOU DON'T NEED TO REMEMBER TO PACK AN EXTRA

In my pre-cup life, I was the woman who was constantly wandering the halls of my office like a traveler who had lost her way, accosting any woman who crossed my path to see if she had a spare tampon. Because I was too scatterbrained to remember to pack a tampon half the time, and the office tampon machine was always broken (I have found that pretty much *all* tampon machines are usually broken), the first day of most of my periods were characterized by a hurried lunch hour trip to CVS, or an improvised pad made out of a quarter pound of layered office toilet paper. Neither option was a great way to start what was already the most annoying week of my month. But with a menstrual cup, there's much less to remember. Since you wear a menstrual cup continuously throughout your period, and remove it only to empty and clean it every few hours, there's no chance of forgetting it when you head out somewhere where it will be hard to acquire or change a tampon (like, say, the beach, or a Van Halen concert). You only need to buy a new one once a year, so there's no need to run out and pick up a new one at the start of every period; and since you reuse it, there's no chance of getting your period early and being caught without anything to sop up your crimson tide.

YOU ONLY NEED TO CHANGE IT ONCE EVERY 10 HOURS

I am phenomenally lazy. Like "I am wearing stretch pants right now because I thought buttons were too much to deal with on a Monday" lazy. And cups are perfect for the lazy menstruator – on regular flow days, [menstrual cups only need to be changed](#)

[2-3 times a day](#), and can even be left in place for 10 hours without leaking. On heavier flow days, they need to be changed a little more frequently, but they still hold one full ounce (around 28 grams of blood, which is a lot – we usually only produce two ounces of blood during an entire period). Your [average tampon holds 6-9 grams of blood](#), which means a lot more time in the bathroom, trying to pull something bloody out of your vag.

Since I am such an outspoken evangelist for cups, I get a lot of questions about whether they'll spill if you actually leave one in for ten hours. There are two parts to this answer: 1. you produce way less blood in any given day than you think, so the times that you actually fill your cup to the top are extremely few and far between; and 2. yes, if you get distracted and leave it in for ten hours while you're on a very heavy flow, the cup will fill up, and you toilet will look like the elevator from *The Shining* when you empty your cup out. But in six years of cup usage, this misfortune has only befallen me twice, and believe me when I say I am the most distracted person alive, and way worse at paying attention to anything than you are. So while a cup brimming with blood can be a risk, it's not a huge one.

IT WON'T DRY OUT YOUR VAGINA

It seems totally counter-intuitive that your vagina could feel dry while liquid is pretty much continuously pouring out of it, but that's what always happened to me with periods. The [hormonal changes that occur during your menstrual cycle](#) – primarily a drop in estrogen levels right when your periods starts – can lead to a dry-feeling vagina. [Tampons can irritate a dry vagina](#), too – I spent many a pre-cup day wincing in my office bathroom, pulling out a tampon that seemed stuck to the walls of my vagina. Since a menstrual cup is made of silicone rather than cotton, it is less likely to feel “stuck” to the walls of your dry vagina– and since you change them less often than a tampon, it also cuts down on the

irritation of taking things in and out of a dry vagina, too.

IT WON'T LEAK IN YOUR SLEEP

If you take the sheets off my mattress, it looks like someone committed a very sloppy and poorly planned murder on it. I've had it for about ten years, and in the first few years that I had it, nearly every part of it got speckled with blood from tampons and pads that leaked while I slept. I'm a tosser and turner when I sleep, which meant that pads usually ended up balled into the back of my underwear, giving me a wedgie and letting blood drip through the front of my panties. And my tampons leaked through nearly every time I slept with them, even when my flow didn't seem that heavy. It seemed like no matter what I did, I was doomed to live a life of scrubbing blood stains out of my pajama bottoms in my bathroom sink at 7 a.m.

This is where I am most devoted to my cup – it cut sleep leakage out of my life. Since a cup works by creating a [seal inside your vagina](#), in my years of using one, I have been spared the indignity of having to explain weird mattress blood stains to gentleman callers and/or waking up most mornings of my period with bloody underpants. Ugh, I feel gross even typing that.

IT MIGHT MAKE YOU FEEL LESS SELF-CONSCIOUS WHILE HOOKING UP

As a tampon user, I was extremely uptight about the idea of fooling around while I had a tampon in – the idea that the guy I was with might accidentally touch my tampon string while probing my lady bits just kinda weirded me out. Someone else

touching my tampon string felt too intimate, but not in the good way – it felt more like the kind of intimacy based around bodily grossness that you have with your gynecologist. I would get distracted by the idea of it, and then would begin wondering if my tampon was leaking, and before I knew it, I just wasn't horny any more. I generally avoided a lot of sexual contact during my period for this reason, among others.

My switch to menstrual cups has totally turned things around for me. Not having to worry about my boyfriend accidentally yanking on my tampon string – or getting his hand covered in tampon leakage – has loosened me up significantly on the “third base while you're on your period” front. I do still take my menstrual cup out to have actual intercourse – although there is a line of [menstrual cups that you can wear while having sex](#) – but just knowing that I can jump into fooling around without having to worry about some weird hand-string contact (or take it out too soon and accidentally bleed into my underpants while we're making out) has been a relief.

IT DOESN'T GET PUSHED OUT WHEN YOU POOP

Okay, I should specify that this is just based on my own personal experience, not any kind of formal research – I've seen a number of women online say just the opposite, that pooping seems to squeeze their cup out of place. So this is just one vagina's tale. But, personally, using a cup has been a pooping-related game changer.

I used to constantly push my tampons out when I pooped – not all the way out, but into that awkward halfway-out position, where the end of the tampon is irritating your vaginal opening, and the top of the tampon is poking something sensitive, and everything is awful. That would lead to me then pulling out a half-dry tampon – which is also a special kind

of ladybit torture – and then inserting a new tampon into my now irritated vag, making the entire situation a triple crown of vaginal unpleasantness. Since using a cup, I've had the rare occasion where I didn't insert it correctly beforehand, and pooping squeezes it into an uncomfortable position – but when it's inserted properly, I can't feel it, it doesn't move, and I can finally focus on the important things while pooping (i.e. reading a three month old issue of *Us Weekly*).

**Learning how to Bounce!
Resiliency : What is it? Why
it matters.**



Michael H Ballard Canada

Resiliency is starting to gather more attention. Personal resilience helps us stay healthier, do better in school, have happier relationships, experience more joy and do better in our jobs. Family resilience also offers that and makes for better neighbours and safer communities. Resilience in the workplace helps with staff engagement and retention. The benefits of creating, having and nurturing a personal, family, organizational and community culture of resilience is very valuable.

But, what is it? Resilience is our ability to “bounce back” from adversity. Life’s BIGStuff events that we all have happen to us eventually. Death in the family, loss of a job, divorce, poor performance at work or school, chronic illness, having your house burn down you get the picture.

Resiliency is a set of key factors we can all use to assist us stay safer and move forward and often create more successful

outcomes. There are two major parts to Resiliency. Inner and outer resilience. Inner resilience includes the beliefs you hold to be true, your problem solving skills, and the goals you've set for yourself. Outer resilience includes the values of the community you live in, teams you've built around yourself, the education you have, the support you have from family to name just a few.

So how do we get more? Well to further develop and deepen our inner resiliency a key place to start includes: – Our self control. Moderation is a very powerful factor in being resilient. Our resistance to temptation, our restraint to over doing things is a great place to start. Key skills to help us manage our inner world include: Diaphragm Breathing and Meditative Walking. More on this in a future column.

To further develop our outer resiliency developing and deepening trusting relationships with people who treat us with respect, sharing time with others that have high expectations of us and them of us are powerful places to help us deepen and widen our ability to thrive. Setting boundaries and expectations with others politely and clearly make a difference.

Resiliency is a life long process. A key to me is that we have to set boundaries and expectations of our self and with others. Being resilient offers up life as a life long adventure. It helps us stretch into life's BIGStuff moments and issues keeping us safer and happier and often offering us much better outcomes.

So until next time, Imagine Yourself with more [Resiliency for Life](#).

Menopause – The Truth And The Surprise Ending



“Your boat is on a very choppy sea,” said Maryann knowingly. She is one of the select older and wiser women in my life, who got me through a turbulent period, back there.

I was recounting my story to her with my head in my hands. Life had suddenly become very confusing. Continuing the travel analogy, one minute I was cruising a marvelously lit highway in a 4×4. The next, without noticing, I had taken a wrong turn, I was bouncing down a dark dirt track in a banger.

“How did I get here,” I kept asking, “and,” (more to the point) “how can I get out? ” I was used to problem solving and multi-tasking with executive efficiency. As a journalist and broadcaster working in the fashion industry for over 30 years, while raising a family, running a business and campaigning for a variety of women’s issues in my daily practice, I had not signed up for this chaos. I quickly became anxious about what each new day would hold.

Every woman’s experience of the menopause is different. It’s a process of oestrogen and progesterone withdrawal and it will impact you in a unique way, because you are unique. Everyone I have spoken to laments the taboo nature of talking about what to expect, but perhaps we could all feel less ambivalent about

the forthcoming rite of passage if we knew menopause delivers a mind-blowing mid-life recalibration – one with a valuable message of growth and expansion.

For me it started with Titanic sinking feelings, which amplified the tension and discomfort of unresolved problems in my life. I was working hard in a career I loved but one minute I'd be up, the next I'd be wearing a cement straight-jacket hurtling to the bottom of a murky abyss accompanied by the voice of condemnation. "You really are finished," it would say.

Then there was the brain fug that convinced me I was going down with early dementia. Industry knowledge evaporated and I found myself unable to remember names, events and dates. My vocabulary shrank too. I would have to script myself to within an inch of my life to feign work-place competence. At home, both daughters would play ludicrous guessing games to get me to the end of my sentence and my youngest still reminds me of the day I forgot her name.

There were minimal physical affects however. I dutifully utilised insomnia to fit in extra work and I could tolerate the mild heat surges any day, but I know some women are driven to distraction by the intensity of night sweats and day-time hot flushes. I asked my mother and an older girl friend for insight. The words 'Plain Sailing' and 'out the other side in no time,' were bandied about. My GP said I sounded alright to her.

Meanwhile, I was medicating myself with generous amounts of Cabernet Sauvignon each evening. Anesthetising anxiety and panic attacks this way helped me limp on for a bit longer, clinging to the remnants of my previously ordered existence. Then I made an important decision. I stopped and stood still. "What do I need to understand?" I asked myself, having read enough to realise that female bodies are powerful intuitive barometers and mine was trying to tell me something. This is what I learned.

I routinely put others first which meant racing through my life over-achieving and under-prioritising me.

The voice was right: I was finished. But an ending of the way I *had* been living would be a very good thing. Since leaving Uni I had put in very long hours building a career. As a dedicated parent and partner, I routinely put others first which meant racing through my life over-achieving and under-prioritising me. Exhausted and running on empty, letting go of my expectations of me would be the first positive move.

In menopause our body roars. All these years it has put up and shut up and now will not tolerate abuse or disrespect any longer. This commotion is simply a demand by your newly awake self for quality not quantity, for re-evaluation and re-balancing. Perhaps (when your time comes) you plan to put your hands over your ears? Think again, there is nothing so primal and immediate as your body's hormonal call to action.

I listened. I cut myself a break. As a result I'm no longer buckling under the stress of numerous projects running concurrently. I've made other changes too. I attend less time-wasting meetings, engage in much less unwaged work and collaborate more selectively. I'm thinking about the bigger picture as I celebrate my strengths and focus on the positives, while gracefully accepting my limitations... finally.

Now, for the first time, free of hands-on child-wrangling (the final child, birthed at 41, is 16) I'm in an intense relationship with myself. It's a joy, as the voice inside me grows stronger and more enquiring of new perspectives. I have grown my hair and grown out my colour. Shedding old ways and reframing people's perceptions of me, I left the People Pleaser behind. This has been an act of common sense.

"She's let herself go." A deliberately pejorative judgment reveals disapproval of maturing feminine appearance. The assertion that we could try harder to cling on to our youth supports every unrealistic beauty claim for anti-ageing balms and unguents and every marketing prompt for hair dye. I'm not

buying it. Let's get one thing straight: our gender has been groomed to self-objectify while beauty corporations grow rich and prosperous. In the process of consuming femininity as a set of unrealistic appearance goals, perhaps we have become blind to our internal exquisiteness and it's time to open our eyes.

I love fashion and self-styling and I have great fun with my image, but I don't play the patriarchal game of defining myself as decorative dressing in a man-made world. Maybe this has helped me to embrace the thrill and privilege of age with its intellectual and experiential gifts. I do believe that if we can stop focusing solely on exteriors and start embracing personhood, post-menopause becomes a position of status and composure.

For the record... We do not let ourselves go, just the flotsam and jetsam of an earlier existence.

The mirror becomes less important in the most fundamental way with the realisation that age does not equal atrophy and that we are not diminished by the passing of years. Instead we are intensified, our force amplified and our knowledge expanded. I'm not pretending life miraculously becomes uncomplicated and undemanding – challenges await every age and stage. Women, however, are great facilitators of others so in menopause we can and must reclaim our time and assets for ourselves. This is not selfish, this is smart.

The simple truth is that just like the adolescent surge of hormonal activity providing an exciting gateway to adult sexuality, menopause, (the process in reverse and in withdrawal) enables an additional and equally compelling portal into yet another selfhood. Step towards this doorway with confidence that once out the other side you will be renewed. Unlike me, you might prepare yourself mentally and physically beforehand by choosing less stress, more sleep, a healthy diet and supportive friends. You are not powerless, when you choose to surrender to something bigger than you.

Treat yourself with kindness and tolerance as the bio-chemical make-up of your body re-arranges itself. It will be an education so expect enlightenment.

[Post-menopause](#) needs renaming and reclaiming for what it truly is, a magnificent time of curiosity, creativity and rank. It's not surprising that some societies have been threatened by this natural female evolution to leader and mentor. In Pagan times of Goddess Worship, female tribal elders were respected and celebrated but with the introduction of Christianity came the brutal persecution of middle-aged women as witches and heretics. As feminist history explains, older women were simply channeling their menopausal force to intervene in an oppressive culture that undermined female wisdom and equality.

Hundreds of years later the quest for gender parity and fairness remains and growing old without self-reproach is one deliciously subversive act all women can embrace. Use everything the fashion and beauty worlds offer but bring these products into your life on your terms. There is no need for any woman to feel ambivalent, even fearful of ageing, in fact with the right physical and mental health supports, we can thrive. Having roused the ancient mystic, healer and tribal elder in me, I am on the journey towards Cronehood, and I love it.

Here are a few practical tips to get you through...

Getting physical and emotional support

I was introduced to bio-identical hormones and unlike the one-size fits all HRT from the NHS, BIH is a bespoke system that can be tailor-made for each woman. There is a cost but it was the best £500 I have spent. Dr. Lynette Yong read my blood test and prescribed DHEA. This hormone can be converted to whatever is needed by the body. My memory improved instantly. The progesterone cream I would later take would act as a calmer to alleviate anxiety and stress. I now pay a fraction of that to repeat my prescription every couple of months.

Systematic Kinesiology

Francesca Topolski uses muscle testing to tell which minerals the body is deficient in and can restore the body's balance with dynamic effects. My magnesium levels were low and my adrenal glands were stuck in fight or flight mode which in turn created insomnia (this would have also caused memory problems.) She helped me to make small changes with big impacts.

Counselling

Make it a post-menopausal woman and a wise old sage. Since menopause amplifies emotions, you will find unresolved issues become more urgent to look at. Be prepared to take responsibility for your own contribution to the areas in your life that aren't working and be ready to take action. My Maryann was recommended by a good friend – you need someone in your area who comes through the same channel. Ask for recommendations or look through a directory but check testimonials.

Reading

The Wisdom of Menopause by Dr. Christiane Northrup. This was my bible. Dr. Christiane gives advice on every stage your body will go through and how to alleviate the many symptoms. She cites medical studies in support of your femininity, intuition and power that will thrill you while combining spiritual and personal stories of herself and other women to help you get to calmer waters.

Bio Identical Hormones By Dr. Uzzi Reiss, will help you understand your symptoms and get involved in your meds!

The Crone – Women of Age, Wisdom and Power By Barbara G Walker, invaluable for your re-calibration – unlearn what you have learned.

Women's History of the World By Rosalind Miles. Celebrate women and their amazing grit, determination and ingenuity.

Fitness

Now is the time to begin Yoga or some other regular and calming activity. 20 minutes most mornings will create a new and focus headspace as well as a supple and strong body.

Clothes and fashion

I love dressing up more than ever. Quality and good design is key to promote modernity and sophistication. I love wearing clothes by emerging designers and I prioritise up-cycling and sustainability.

Beauty and skincare

Organic products like Liz Earl and Weleda keep my skin supple and perfume (my current favourite is Atkinsons 24 Old Bond Street) gives me a true lift.

Hair

Make sure you are working with a knowledgeable hairdresser to achieve your chosen natural tone. Matthew at Charles Worthington helped me over a period of years to grow out sections of coloured hair first and then create high and low lights around the crown to disguise change-over

Talk

Explain to your loved ones that you are evolving. My daughters understand the changes that have taken place and I'm happy they are now better prepared for their eventual menopause than I was. My husband was kind and considerate. Sharing my vulnerabilities and challenges strengthened my relationships and my honesty was appreciated.

Top 10 Ways to Beat the Heat

The scorching summer heat is hard on our bodies, our moods, and our electric bills. Don't let the temperature get you down, though. These ten tips will help you keep cool even if it feels like the sun is out to get you.

10. Drink More Water

You know how important it is to stay hydrated all year round. When you're sweating a lot, either because of exercise or the summer heat, drinking enough water becomes even more important. As the CDC suggests, think of your body like an air conditioner:

Whenever your body heats up from physical activity or the hot weather outside, your internal air conditioner turns on and you begin to sweat. And remember, now that your air conditioner is using its coolant (your sweat), it is important to refill the tank – by drinking lots of H₂O.

As with other hydration myths, water isn't your only option, but it's free and easily accessible for most of us. Even if you have to trick yourself into drink more water and learn to love the taste of it, you'll be much more comfortable if you keep refilling your water glass.

9. Keep Excessive Sweat at Bay

For many of us, sweat-inducing humidity is the worst part of summer. Even if you don't have excessive sweat issues, you can get the sweating under control with a few tricks, like applying antiperspirant at night so it works more effectively and wearing breathable clothing materials, such as cotton.

8. Make a DIY Air Conditioner

Running the AC the entire summer gets expensive. You can make your own pseudo-air conditioner on the cheap with some basic materials, such as the styrofoam-and-fan version shown above. Don't like the look of that? There are several other DIY cooling options to try.

7. Optimize Your Fans

Did you know that if you face your fan out, rather than in at night, your room will stay cooler and you might be able to sleep more comfortably? Day or night, you can use a temperature controller (or build one yourself) to automatically turn the fan on or off based on the temperature and save your energy—literally. If you have a ceiling fan, run it counter-clockwise (the “summer” higher-speed setting) for optimum cooling.

6. Keep Your Food Cool and Avoid Using the Oven

Summer might be a great time to eat outdoors, but some foods and drinks aren't that enjoyable when heated by the sun. You can make a zeer pot (aka evaporative cooler) for your food and drinks with just two containers or create ice blocks for your cooler using old milk cartons. When it's too hot to cook, consider making cold soups, relying on electrical appliances like the versatile rice cooker, or try these “no-cook” or “oven-free” recipe ideas.

5. Exercise Comfortably, Even in the Heat

Just because it's hot out doesn't mean you have to stop exercising. You can get used to exercising in the heat and use common sense strategies such as switching to water sports, avoiding the sun when it's strongest, and exercising in short bursts. Precooling techniques can also prevent you from overheating when you work out in hot weather.

4. Optimize Your Windows

You might not need to run your air conditioner if you pay a little more attention to your windows in the summer. Close the windows and use insulated drapes to keep the sun out during the day and open them

at night when the sun is down. You can also hang a damp towel in front of the window to cool the air flowing into your home and open opposing windows or windows on the top and bottom floors for maximum air flow.

3. Cool Your Car Down Quickly

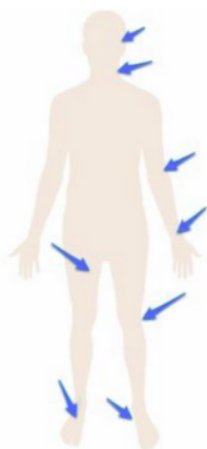
This Japanese trick will get your oven-like car closer to bearable temperature. Roll down one window and open and close the opposite door a few times to cool that car down.

2. Stay Cool While You Sleep

Summer heat is worst when you're trying to get some shuteye, because a higher body temperature makes it harder to fall asleep. If you feel like an insomniac in summer, cool your head with a special pillow like the Chillow, sleep on top of a wet sheet (aka the "Egyptian method"), or try one of these other strategies in our cool sleeping guide or this infographic.

1. Know Your Body's Best Cooling Points

Finally, if you're stuck in the heat and can't find get to a cooler place, know your body's best cooling points, e.g., your wrist and neck. By applying a ice cubes wrapped in a towel (or any other cold object) to these pulse points, you'll cool down more quickly and effectively.



What is blood cancer? The symptoms and treatment you need to know



Blood cancer is the fifth most common type of cancer and third biggest cancer killer in the UK, yet it can still often go undiagnosed when patients visit their doctors with the initial symptoms. Sky Sports presenter **Simon Thomas** is now campaigning to raise awareness of the disease following **the death of his wife Gemma**, who passed away just four days after she was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia in November.

Sharing a tweet from cancer charity Bloodwise, Simon told his

followers: “Acute Myeloid Leukaemia took my wife Gemma and Ethan’s mum just before Christmas aged only 40 years and just three days after being diagnosed. This is so important.” He added: “Three times my wife Gemma went to the doctor in six days and three times she was sent home and told to rest. Four days after her final visit to her GP she was dead. We have to help and train our GP’s and to detect #bloodcancer earlier. @bloodwise_uk is doing this. #hiddencancer.”

What is blood cancer?

Blood cancer happens when something goes wrong with the development of your blood cells. This stops them working properly and may prevent your blood from doing what it normally does to keep you healthy, like fighting off infections or helping to repair your body.

What are the symptoms of blood cancer?

Each specific type of blood cancer will have different symptoms, but there are lots of common symptoms such as:

- Extreme tiredness
- Repeated infections
- Unexplained weight loss
- Easy bruising and/or bleeding
- Drenching night sweats
- Itchy skin
- Lumps or swelling in your neck, head, groin or stomach
- Bone and/or joint pain

How is blood cancer diagnosed?

Many blood cancer symptoms are shared with illnesses like colds and flu – for example tiredness, fever or an infection. Lumps are a common symptom of lymphoma, but other, less serious illnesses also cause lumps. Because of this, see your doctor if you have symptoms or groups of symptoms that you

think are unusual for you, or last for longer than normal.

The most common types of tests for blood cancer are blood tests and biopsies, but the tests you have will depend on your symptoms and what type of blood cancer is suspected.

What is the treatment for blood cancer?

The treatment you receive will depend on the type of blood cancer you have, but may include chemotherapy, stem cell transplant or taking drugs that encourage your immune system to fight cancerous cells.

This content is not intended to be a substitute for professional advice. Visit your GP with any questions you have regarding a medical condition.

How to get your mojo back – Get rid of your stress



Stress is a funny emotion; it stops us from thinking of new ideas or solutions and causes us to feel rather ordinary. Stress and worry blocks happiness, creativity and living life

to the max.

I remember there was a time in my life for a period of about 2 years in which I lost my routine and passion for my life. I stopped exercising, I stacked on 10kg, was struggling with some emotional issues and it was the unhappiest time of my life to date. I was tense and stressing about everything. This was a first for me, for I am a very positive person and have been a keen exerciser my whole life. During this time however, exercise seemed like a chore, I was so exhausted all the time and I worried that I would feel more tired if I exercised. I also thought "what's the point?" Apart from work I had no routine and nothing inspired me.

Then my therapist/energy healer, suggested I take up Salsa dancing to boost my "feminine energy" and believed it would be of benefit to me. She recommended a dance school, I contacted them and started Zouk classes- a Brazilian style of dance. At first I was quite stiff and worried about the steps a lot, my shoulders were tight and I was looking down trying to do perfect steps. However, the teacher, Alex, did me a big favour and reminded me loosen up, to let go of trying to get it perfect and instead give in to the dance and to dance with my heart and soul. I realised in class, that the way I was dancing Zouk was the way I was dancing in my life – stiff and trying to control everything, which is an impossible feat. Sometimes, we all need reminding, and Zouk was that for me, to let go, smile and embrace life again!

As I started to give in to the dance, I was connecting with me again, I found myself smiling with my heart and soul, trusting in me and it felt so good. I started going with the flow more in my own life, and trusting in the process without getting attached to a particular outcome. As a result, it sparked my passion for running and gym (I even joined a gym on an 18 month contract – commitment?!), I'm feeling more creative with my work and positive about my future.

Inspiration and new ideas only come when the mind is clear and relaxed. The stress I was feeling previously blocked out all the good that I'm experiencing now.

I also learnt when you trust, let go and embrace life, something ignites inside of you that money can't buy; others will want a piece and ask you how to get it and you simply say, "I let go of trying to control everything, I chose

happiness.” Because when you do, more good things will come, like a beautiful ripple effect.

I recommend any style of dance for both men and women, it’s a way to connect with who you are and iron out the stiffness and stress that you may be holding onto. Is it time to let go?

Stay happy and healthy,

Eleni